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THE BITTER CRY
OF
OUTCAST LONDON.

AN INQUIRY INTO
THE CONDITION OF
THE ABJECT POOR.

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THE BITTER CRY

OF

OUTCAST LONDON.



THERE is no more hopeful sign in the Christian Church of to-day than the increased attention which is being given by it to the poor and outcast classes of society. Of these it has never been wholly neglectful ; if it had it would have ceased to be Christian. But it has, as yet, only imperfectly realised and fulfilled its mission to the poor. Until recently it has contented itself with sustaining some outside organizations, which have charged themselves with this special function, or what is worse, has left the matter to individuals or to little bands of Christians having no organization. For the rest it has been satisfied with a superficial and inadequate district visitation, with the more or less indiscriminate distribution of material charities, and with opening a few rooms here and there into which the poorer people have been gathered, and by which a few have been rescued. All this is good in its way and has done good ; but by all only the merest edge of the great dark region of poverty, misery,

squalor and immorality has been touched. We are not losing sight of the London City Mission, whose agents are everywhere, and whose noble work our investigations have led us to value more than ever, but after all has been done the churches are making the discovery that seething in the very centre of our great cities, concealed by the thinnest crust of civilization and decency, is a vast mass of moral corruption, of heart-breaking misery and absolute godlessness, and that scarcely anything has been done to take into this awful slough the only influences that can purify or remove it.

Whilst we have been building our churches and solacing ourselves with our religion and dreaming that the millennium was coming, the poor have been growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral more corrupt; the gulf has been daily widening which separates the lowest classes of the community from our churches and chapels, and from all decency and civilization. It is easy to bring an array of facts which seem to point to the opposite conclusion—to speak of the noble army of men and women who penetrate the vilest haunts, carrying with them the blessings of the gospel; of the encouraging reports published by Missions, Reformatories, Refuges, Temperance Societies; of Theatre Services, Midnight Meetings and Special Missions. But what does it all amount to? We are simply living in a fool's paradise if we suppose that all these agencies combined are doing a thousandth part of what needs to be done, a hundredth part of what *could* be

done by the Church of Christ. We must face the facts ; and these compel the conviction that THIS TERRIBLE FLOOD OF SIN AND MISERY IS GAINING UPON US. 'It is rising every day. This statement is made as the result of a long, patient and sober inquiry, undertaken for the purpose of discovering the actual state of the case and the remedial action most likely to be effective. Convinced that it is high time some combined and organized effort was made by all denominations of Christians, though not for denominational purposes, the London Congregational Union have determined to open in several of the lowest and most needy districts of the metropolis, suitable Mission Halls, as a base of operations for evangelistic work. They have accordingly made this diligent search, and some of the results are set forth in the following pages, in the hope that all who have the power may be stimulated to help the Union in the great and difficult enterprise which they have undertaken.

Two cautions it is important to bear in mind. First, the information given *does not refer to selected cases*. It simply reveals a state of things which is found in house after house, court after court, street after street. Secondly, there *has been absolutely no exaggeration*. It is a plain recital of plain facts. Indeed, no respectable printer would print, and certainly no decent family would admit even the driest statement of the horrors and infamies discovered in one brief visitation from house to house. *So far from making the worst of our facts for the purpose of appealing to emotion, we have been compelled to tone down everything, and wholly*

to omit what most needs to be known, or the ears and eyes of our readers would have been insufferably outraged. Yet even this qualified narration must be to every Christian heart a loud and bitter cry, appealing for the help which it is the supreme mission of the Church to supply. It should be further stated that our investigations were made in the summer. The condition of the poor during the winter months must be very much worse.

NON-ATTENDANCE AT WORSHIP.

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to say of the hundreds of thousands who compose the class referred to, that very few attend any place of worship. It is a very tame thing to say, and a very little thing compared with what must follow, but it is needful to a proper statement of our case. Before going to the lower depths, where our investigations were principally carried on, we find in the neighbourhood of Old Ford, in 147 consecutive houses, inhabited for the most part by the respectable working class, 212 families, 118 of which never, under any circumstances, attend a place of worship. Out of 2290 persons living in consecutive houses at Bow Common, only 88 adults and 47 children ever attend, and as 64 of these are connected with one Mission Hall, only 24 out of the entire number worship elsewhere. One street off Leicester Square contains 246 families, and only 12 of these are ever represented at the house of God. In another street in Pentonville, out of 100 families only 12 persons attend any sanctuary, whilst the number of attendants in one

district of St. George's-in-the-East is 39 persons out of 4235. Often the numbers given of those who do attend include such as only go once or twice a year, at some charity distribution, so that our figures are more favourable than the actual facts. Constantly we come across persons who have never been to church or chapel for 20 years, 28 years, more than 30 years ; and some persons as old as 64 never remember having been in a place of worship at all. Indeed, with the exception of a very small proportion, the idea of going has never dawned upon these people. And who can wonder? Think of

THE CONDITION IN WHICH THEY LIVE.

We do not say the condition of their homes, for how can those places be called homes, compared with which the lair of a wild beast would be a comfortable and healthy spot? Few who will read these pages have any conception of what these pestilential human rookeries are, where tens of thousands are crowded together amidst horrors which call to mind what we have heard of the middle passage of the slave ship. To get into them you have to penetrate courts reeking with poisonous and malodorous gases arising from accumulations of sewage and refuse scattered in all directions and often flowing beneath your feet ; courts, many of them which the sun never penetrates, which are never visited by a breath of fresh air, and which rarely know the virtues of a drop of cleansing water. You have to ascend rotten staircases, which threaten to give way beneath every step, and which,

in some places, have already broken down, leaving gaps that imperil the limbs and lives of the unwary. You have to grope your way along dark and filthy passages swarming with vermin. Then, if you are not driven back by the intolerable stench, you may gain admittance to the dens in which these thousands of beings who belong, as much as you, to the race for whom Christ died, herd together. Have you pitied the poor creatures who sleep under railway arches, in carts or casks, or under any shelter which they can find in the open air? You will see that they are to be envied in comparison with those whose lot it is to seek refuge here. Eight feet square—that is about the average size of very many of these rooms. Walls and ceiling are black with the accretions of filth which have gathered upon them through long years of neglect. It is exuding through cracks in the boards overhead; it is running down the walls; it is everywhere. What goes by the name of a window is half of it stuffed with rags or covered by boards to keep out wind and rain; the rest is so begrimed and obscured that scarcely can light enter or anything be seen outside. Should you have ascended to the attic, where at least some approach to fresh air might be expected to enter from open or broken window, you look out upon the roofs and ledges of lower tenements, and discover that the sickly air which finds its way into the room has to pass over the putrefying carcasses of dead cats or birds, or viler abominations still. The buildings are in such miserable repair as to suggest the thought that if the wind could only reach them they would soon be toppling about the heads of

their occupants. As to furniture—you may perchance discover a broken chair, the tottering relics of an old bedstead, or the mere fragment of a table ; but more commonly you will find rude substitutes for these things in the shape of rough boards resting upon bricks, an old hamper or box turned upside down, or more frequently still, nothing but rubbish and rags.

Every room in these rotten and reeking tenements houses a family, often two. In one cellar a sanitary inspector reports finding a father, mother, three children and four pigs ! In another room a missionary found a man ill with small pox, his wife just recovering from her eighth confinement, and the children running about half naked and covered with dirt. Here are seven people living in one underground kitchen, and a little dead child lying in the same room. Elsewhere is a poor widow, her three children, and a child who had been dead thirteen days. Her husband, who was a cabman, had shortly before committed suicide. Here lives a widow and her six children, including one daughter of 29, another of 21, and a son of 27. Another apartment contains father, mother and six children, two of whom are ill with scarlet fever. In another nine brothers and sisters, from 29 years of age downwards, live, eat and sleep together. Here is a mother who turns her children into the street in the early evening because she lets her room for immoral purposes until long after midnight, when the poor little wretches creep back again if they have not found some miserable shelter elsewhere. Where there are beds they

are simply heaps of dirty rags, shavings or straw, but for the most part these miserable beings huddle together upon the filthy boards. The tenant of this room is a widow, who herself occupies the only bed, and lets the floor to a married couple for 2s. 6d. per week. In many cases matters are made worse by the unhealthy occupations followed by those who dwell in these habitations. Here you are choked as you enter by the air laden with particles of the superfluous fur pulled from the skins of rabbits, rats, dogs and other animals in their preparation for the furrier. Here the smell of paste and of drying match-boxes, mingling with other sickly odours, overpowers you ; or it may be the fragrance of stale fish or vegetables, not sold on the previous day, and kept in the room overnight. Even when it is possible to do so the people seldom open their windows, but if they did it is questionable whether much would be gained, for the external air is scarcely less heavily charged with poison than the atmosphere within.

Wretched as these rooms are they are beyond the means of many who wander about all day, picking up a living as they can, and then take refuge at night in one of the common lodging-houses that abound. These are often the resorts of thieves and vagabonds of the lowest types, and some are kept by receivers of stolen goods. In the kitchen men and women may be seen cooking their food, washing their clothes, or lolling about smoking and gambling. In the sleeping room are long rows of beds on each side, sometimes 60 or 80 in one room. In many cases both sexes are allowed to herd

together without any attempt to preserve the commonest decency. But there is a lower depth still. Hundreds cannot even scrape together the two-pence required to secure them the privilege of herding in those sweltering common sleeping rooms, and so they huddle together upon the stairs and landings, where it is no uncommon thing to find six or eight in the early morning.

That people condemned to exist under such conditions take to drink and fall into sin is surely a matter for little surprise. We may rather say, as does one recent and reliable explorer, that they are "entitled to credit for not being twenty times more depraved than they are." One of the saddest results of this over-crowding is the inevitable association of honest people with criminals. Often is the family of an honest working man compelled to take refuge in a thieves' kitchen; in the houses where they live their rooms are frequently side by side, and continual contact with the very worst of those who have come out of our gaols is a matter of necessity. There can be no question that numbers of habitual criminals would never have become such, had they not by force of circumstances been packed together in these slums with those who were hardened in crime. Who can wonder that every evil flourishes in such hotbeds of vice and disease? Who can wonder that little children taken from these hovels to the hospital cry, when they are well, through dread of being sent back to their former misery? Who can wonder that young girls wander off into a life of immorality, which promises release from such conditions?

Who can wonder that the public-house is "the Elysian field of the tired toiler?"

IMMORALITY

is but the natural outcome of conditions like these. "Marriage," it has been said, "as an institution, is not fashionable in these districts." And this is only the bare truth. Ask if the men and women living together in these rookeries are married, and your simplicity will cause a smile. Nobody knows. Nobody cares. Nobody expects that they are. In exceptional cases only could your question be answered in the affirmative. Incest is common; and no form of vice and sensuality causes surprise or attracts attention. Those who appear to be married are often separated by a mere quarrel, and they do not hesitate to form similar companionships immediately. One man was pointed out who for some years had lived with a woman, the mother of his three children. She died and in less than a week he had taken another woman in her place. A man was living with a woman in the low district called "The Mint." He went out one morning with another man for the purpose of committing a burglary and by that other man was murdered. The murderer returned saying that his companion had been caught and taken away to prison; and the same night he took the place of the murdered man. The only check upon communism in this regard is jealousy and not virtue. The vilest practices are looked upon with the most

matter-of-fact indifference. The low parts of London are the sink into which the filthy and abominable from all parts of the country seem to flow. Entire courts are filled with thieves, prostitutes and liberated convicts. In one street are 35 houses, 32 of which are known to be brothels. In another district are 43 of these houses, and 428 fallen women and girls, many of them not more than 12 years of age. A neighbourhood whose population is returned at 10,100, contains 400 who follow this immoral traffic, their ages varying from 13 to 50; and of the moral degradation of the people, some idea may be formed from an incident which was brought to our notice. An East-end missionary rescued a young girl from an immoral life, and obtained for her a situation with people who were going abroad. He saw her to Southampton, and on his return was violently abused by the girl's grandmother, who had the sympathy of her neighbours, for having taken away from a poor old woman her means of subsistence.

The misery and sin caused by drink in these districts have often been told, but these horrors can never be set forth either by pen or artist's pencil. In the district of Euston Road is one public-house to every 100 people, counting men, women and children. Immediately around our chapel in Orange Street, Leicester Square, are 100 gin-palaces, most of them very large; and these districts are but samples of what exists in all the localities which we have investigated. Look into one of these glittering saloons, with its motley, miserable crowd, and you may

be horrified as you think of the evil that is nightly wrought there ; but contrast it with any of the abodes which you find in the fetid courts behind them, and you will wonder no longer that it is crowded. With its brightness, its excitement and its temporary forgetfulness of misery, it is a comparative heaven to tens of thousands. How can they be expected to resist its temptations? They could not live if they did not drink, even though they know that by drinking they do worse than die. All kinds of depravity have here their schools. Children who can scarcely walk are taught to steal, and mercilessly beaten if they come back from their daily expeditions without money or money's worth. Many of them are taken by the hand or carried in the arms to the gin-palace, and not seldom may you see mothers urging and compelling their tender infants to drink the fiery liquid. Lounging at the doors and lolling out of windows and prowling about street corners were pointed out several well-known members of the notorious band of "Forty Thieves," who, often in conspiracy with abandoned women, go out after dark to rob people in Oxford Street, Regent Street and other thoroughfares. Here you pass a coffee-house, there a wardrobe shop, there a tobacconist's, and there a grocer's, carrying on a legitimate trade no doubt, but a far different and more remunerative one as well, especially after evening sets in,—all traps to catch the unwary. These particulars indicate but faintly the moral influences from which the dwellers in these squalid regions have no escape, and by which is bred "infancy that knows no

innocence, youth without modesty or shame, maturity that is mature in nothing but suffering and guilt, blasted old age that is a scandal on the name we bear."

Another difficulty with which we have to contend, and one in large measure the cause of what we have described, is the

POVERTY

of these miserable outcasts. The poverty, we mean, of those who try to live honestly ; for notwithstanding the sickening revelations of immorality which have been disclosed to us, those who endeavour to earn their bread by honest work far outnumber the dishonest. And it is to their infinite credit that it should be so, considering that they are daily face to face with the contrast between their wretched earnings and those which are the produce of sin. A child seven years old is known easily to make 10s. 6d. a week by thieving, but what can he earn by such work as match-box making, for which $2\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gross is paid, the maker having to find his own fire for drying the boxes, and his own paste and string? Before he can gain as much as the young thief he must make 56 gross of match-boxes a week, or 1296 a day. It is needless to say that this is impossible, for even adults can rarely make more than an average of half that number. How long then must the little hands toil before they can earn the price of the scantiest meal ! Women, for the work of trousers finishing (*i.e.*, sewing in linings, making button-holes and stitching on the buttons) receive $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. a pair, and have to find their own thread. We ask a woman who is making tweed trousers, how much

she can earn in a day, and are told one shilling. But what does a day mean to this poor soul? *Seventeen hours!* From five in the morning to ten at night—no pause for meals. She eats her crust and drinks a little tea as she works, making in very truth, with her needle and thread, not her living only, but her shroud. For making men's shirts these women are paid 10d. a dozen; lawn tennis aprons, 3d. a dozen; and babies' hoods, from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. a dozen. In St. George's-in-the-East large numbers of women and children, some of the latter only seven years old, are employed in sack-making, for which they get a farthing each. In one house was found a widow and her half idiot daughter making palliasses at 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. each. Here is a woman who has a sick husband and a little child to look after. She is employed at shirt finishing at 3d. a dozen, and by the utmost effort can only earn 6d. a day, out of which she has to find her own thread. Another, with a crippled hand, maintains herself and a blind husband by match-box making, for which she is remunerated on the liberal scale mentioned above; and out of her 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gross she has to pay a girl a penny a gross to help her. Others obtain at Covent Garden in the season 1d. or 2d. a peck for shelling peas, or 6d. a basket for walnuts; and they do well if their labour brings them 10d. or a shilling a day. With men it is comparatively speaking no better. "My master," says one man visited by a recent writer in the *Fortnightly Review*, "gets a pound for what he gives me 3s. for making." And this it is easy to believe, when we know that for a pair of fishing boots which will be sold at

three guineas, the poor workman receives 5s. 3d. if they are made to order, or 4s. 6d. if made for stock. An old tailor and his wife are employed in making policemen's overcoats. They have to make, finish, hot-press, put on the buttons, and find their own thread, and for all this they receive 2s. 10d. for each coat. This old couple work from half-past six in the morning until ten at night, and between them can just manage to make a coat in two days. Here is a mother who has taken away whatever articles of clothing she can strip from her four little children without leaving them absolutely naked. She has pawned them, not for drink, but for coals and food. A shilling is all she can procure, and with this she has bought seven pounds of coals and a loaf of bread. We might fill page after page with these dreary details, but they would become sadly monotonous, for it is the same everywhere. And then it should not be forgotten how hardly upon poverty like this must press the exorbitant demand for rent. Even the rack-renting of Ireland, which so stirred our indignation a little while ago, was merciful by comparison. If by any chance a reluctant landlord can be induced to execute or pay for some long-needed repairs, they become the occasion for new exactions. Going through these rooms we come to one in which a hole, as big as a man's head, has been roughly covered, and how? A piece of board, from an old soap-box, has been fixed over the opening by one nail, and to the tenant has been given a yard and a half of paper with which to cover it; and for this expenditure—perhaps 4d. at

the outside—*three pence a week has been put upon the rent*. If this is enough to arouse our indignation, what must be thought of the following? The two old people referred to above have lived in one room for 14 years, during which time it has only once been partially cleansed. The landlord has undertaken that it shall be done shortly, and for the past three months has been taking 6d. a week extra for rent for what he is thus *going to do*. This is what the helpless have to submit to; they are charged for these pestilential dens a rent which consumes half the earnings of a family, and leaves them no more than from 4d. to 6d. a day for food, clothing and fire; a grinding of the faces of the poor which could scarcely be paralleled in lands of slavery and of notorious oppression. This, however, is not all; for even these depths of poverty and degradation are reached by the Education Act, and however beneficent its purpose, it bears with cruel weight upon the class we have described, to whom twopence or a penny a week for the school fees of each of three or four children, means so much lack of bread.

Amidst such poverty and squalor it is inevitable that one should be constantly confronted with scenes of

HEART-BREAKING MISERY—

misery so pitiful that men whose daily duty it has been for years to go in and out amongst these outcasts, and to be intimately acquainted with their sufferings, and who might, therefore, be supposed to regard with comparatively little

feeling that which would overwhelm an unaccustomed spectator, sometimes come away from their visits so oppressed in spirit and absorbed in painful thought, that they know not whither they are going. How these devoted labourers can pursue their work at all is a marvel, especially when it is remembered that the misery they actually see suggests to them the certain existence of so much more which no human eye discovers. Who can even imagine the suffering which lies behind a case like the following? A poor woman in an advanced stage of consumption, reduced almost to a skeleton, lives in a single room with a drunken husband and five children. When visited she was eating a few green peas. The children were gone to gather some sticks wherewith a fire might be made to boil four potatoes which were lying on the table, and which would constitute the family dinner for the day. Or, take another case, related by Rev. Archibald Brown, who, with his missionaries is doing a noble work amongst the poor in the east of London. People had doubted the accuracy of reports presented by the missionaries, and he accordingly devoted a considerable time to personal visitation and inquiry. He found case after case proving that but little of the wretchedness had been told, and here is a *fair specimen*. At the top of an otherwise empty house lived a family ; the husband had gone to try and find some work. The mother 29 years of age, was sitting on the only chair in the place in front of a grate, destitute of any fire. She was nursing a baby only six weeks old, that had never had anything but

one old rag round it. The mother had nothing but a gown on, and that dropping to pieces ; it was all she had night or day. There were six children under 13 years of age. They were barefooted, and the few rags on them scarcely covered their nakedness. In this room, where was an unclothed infant, the ceiling was in holes. An old bedstead was in the place, and seven sleep in it at night, the eldest girl being on the floor.

This is bad, but it is not the worst. In a room in Wych Street, on the third floor, over a marine store dealer's, there was, a short time ago, an inquest as to the death of a little baby. A man, his wife and three children were living in that room. The infant was the second child who had died, poisoned by the foul atmosphere ; and this dead baby was cut open in the one room where its parents and brothers and sisters lived, ate and slept, *because the parish had no mortuary and no room in which post mortems could be performed !* No wonder that the jurymen who went to view the body sickened at the frightful exhalations. This case was given by Mr. G. R. Sims, in his papers on "How the Poor Live ;" but all the particulars are found in the dry newspaper reports of the inquest. In another miserable room are eight destitute children. Their father died a short time ago, and "on going into the house to-day," says the missionary, "the mother was lying in her coffin." Here is a filthy attic, containing only a broken chair, a battered saucepan and a few rags. On a dirty sack in the centre of the room sits a neglected, ragged, bare-legged little baby

girl of four. Her father is a militiaman, and is away. Her mother is out all day and comes home late at night more or less drunk, and this child is left in charge of the infant that we see crawling about the floor ; left for six or eight hours at a stretch—hungry, thirsty, tired, but never daring to move from her post. And this is the kind of sight which may be seen in a Christian land where it is criminal to ill-treat a horse or an ass.

The child-misery that one beholds is the most heart-rending and appalling element in these discoveries ; and of this not the least is the misery inherited from the vice of drunken and dissolute parents, and manifest in the stunted, misshapen, and often loathsome objects that we constantly meet in these localities. From the beginning of their life they are utterly neglected ; their bodies and rags are alive with vermin ; they are subjected to the most cruel treatment ; many of them have never seen a green field, and do not know what it is to go beyond the streets immediately around them, and they often pass the whole day without a morsel of food. Here is one of three years old picking up some dirty pieces of bread and eating them. We go in at the doorway where it is standing and find a little girl twelve years old. “Where is your mother?” “In the madhouse.” “How long has she been there?” “Fifteen months.” “Who looks after you?” The child, who is sitting at an old table making match-boxes, replies, “I look after my little brothers and sisters as well as I can.” “Where is your father? Is he in work?”

"He has been out of work three weeks, but he has gone to a job of two days this morning." Another house visited contains nine motherless children. The mother's death was caused by witnessing one of her children being run over. The eldest is only fourteen years old. All live in one small room, and there is one bed for five. Here is a poor woman deserted by her husband and left with three little children. One met with an accident a few days ago and broke his arm. He is lying on a shake-down in one corner of the room, with an old sack round him. And here, in a cellar kitchen, are nine little ones. You can scarcely see across the room for smoke and dirt. They are without food and have scarcely any clothing.

It is heart-crushing to think of the misery suggested by such revelations as these; and there is something unspeakably pathetic in the brave patience with which the poor not seldom endure their sufferings, and the tender sympathy which they show toward each other. Where, amongst the well-conditioned, can anything braver and kinder be found than this? A mother, whose children are the cleanest and tidiest in the Board School which they attend, was visited. It was found that, though she had children of her own, she had taken in a little girl, whose father had gone off tramping in search of work. She was propped up in a chair, looking terribly ill, but in front of her, in another chair, was the wash-tub, and the poor woman was making a feeble effort to wash and wring out some of the children's things. She was dying from dropsy, scarcely able to breathe and

enduring untold agony, but to the very last striving to keep her little ones clean and tidy. A more touching sight it would be difficult to present ; we might, however, unveil many more painful ones, but must content ourselves with saying that the evidence we have gathered from personal observation more than justifies the words of the writer before referred to, that “there are (*i.e.*, in addition to those who find their way to our hospitals) men and women who lie and die day by day in their wretched single rooms, sharing all the family trouble, enduring the hunger and the cold, and waiting without hope, without a single ray of comfort, until God curtains their staring eyes with the merciful film of death.”

WHAT IT IS PROPOSED TO DO.

That something needs to be done for this pitiable outcast population must be evident to all who have read these particulars as to their condition—at least, to all who believe them. We are quite prepared for incredulity. Even what we have indicated seems all too terrible to be true. But we have sketched only in faintest outline. Far more vivid must be our colours, deeper and darker far the shades, if we are to present a truthful picture of “Outcast London ;” and so far as we have been able to go we are prepared with evidence, not only to prove every statement, but to show that these statements represent the general condition of thousands upon thousands in this metropolis. Incredulity is not the only difficulty in the way of stirring up Christian people to

help. Despair of success in any such undertaking may paralyse many. We shall be pointed to the fact that without State interference nothing effectual can be accomplished upon any large scale. And *it is* a fact. These wretched people must live somewhere. They must live near the centres where their work lies. They cannot afford to go out by train or tram into the suburbs ; and how, with their poor emaciated, starved bodies, can they be expected—in addition to working twelve hours or more, for a shilling, or less,—to walk three or four miles each way to take and fetch? It is notorious that the Artizans Dwellings Act has, in some respects, made matters worse for them. Large spaces have been cleared of fever-breeding rookeries, to make way for the building of decent habitations, but the rents of these are far beyond the means of the abject poor. They are driven to crowd more closely together in the few stifling places still left to them ; and so Dives makes a richer harvest out of their misery, buying up property condemned as unfit for habitation, and turning it into a gold-mine because the poor must have shelter somewhere, even though it be the shelter of a living tomb.

The State must make short work of this iniquitous traffic, and secure for the poorest the rights of citizenship ; the right to live in something better than fever dens ; the right to live as something better than the uncleanest of brute beasts. This must be done before the Christian missionary can have much chance with them. But because we cannot do all we wish, are we to do nothing? Even

as things are something can be accomplished. Is no lifeboat to put out and no life-belt to be thrown because only half a dozen out of the perishing hundreds can be saved from the wreck? The very records which supply the sad story we have been telling, give also proofs of what can be done by the Gospel and by Christian love and tact and devotion. Gladly do many of these poor creatures receive the Gospel. Little match-box makers are heard singing at their toil, "One more day's work for Jesus." "If only mother was a Christian we should all be happy," said one; and on his miserable bed, amidst squalor and want and pain, a poor blind man dies with the prayer upon his lips, "Jesus, lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly." Another writes, "You have filled my heart with joy, and my little room with sunshine." A second, who now regularly attends a place of worship, says, speaking of the visits of the missionary, "Before he came to visit me I used to sit and make match-boxes on Sunday, but a word now and then has enabled me to look up to the Lord. I don't feel like the same person." Another who himself became a missionary to his own class, and exercised great power over them whenever he spoke, was able to say, "I was as bad as any of you, but the Lord Jesus had mercy upon me, and has made me better and so happy." This man had been a "coal-whipper" of notoriously evil life, and was rescued through his casually going into a room in one of the courts of which we have spoken, where a missionary was holding a meeting. Such results should rebuke our faithlessness.

Even in these dark and noisome places the lamp of Life may be kindled ; even from these miry spots bright gems may be snatched, worth all the labour and all the cost.

It is little creditable to us that all our wealth and effort should be devoted to providing for the spiritual needs of those who are comfortably conditioned, and none of it expended upon the abject poor. It is true that we have not half done our duty to any class, but this fact is no justification of our having wholly neglected this rescue work. To shut up our compassion against those who need it most, because we have not yet done our duty to those who need it less, is a course that we should find it hard to justify to our Master and Lord. His tones were ever those of pitying love even to the most sinful outcast, but would they not gather sternness as He met us with the rebuke : " This ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone " ? An " exceeding bitter cry " is this which goes up to heaven from the misery of London against the apathy of the Church. It is time that Christians opened their ears to it and let it sink down into their hearts. Many pressing needs are taxing the resources of the London Congregational Union, but the Committee feel that this work amongst the poor must no longer be neglected, and that they must do all they can to arouse the Churches of their order to undertake their share of responsibility. They have determined to take immediate action. Having selected three of the very worst districts in London, from which many of the foregoing facts have been gathered, they have resolved at once to begin operations in the very heart of them. No

denominational purpose will sway them, except that they will try to awaken their own denomination to a sense of its duty ; but there will be no attempt to make Congregationalists or to present Congregationalism. Deeper, broader and simpler must this work be than any which can be carried on upon denominational lines. In such a forlorn hope there is no room for sectarianism. The Gospel of the love of Christ must be presented in its simplest form, and the one aim in everything must be to rescue and not to proselytize. Help will be thankfully welcomed from whatever quarter it may come, and help will be freely given to other workers in the same field, if only by any means some may be saved. It is impossible here and yet to give details as to the methods which it is proposed to pursue ; suffice it to say that in each district a Mission Hall will be erected, or some existing building transformed into a Hall having appliances and conveniences requisite for the successful prosecution of the Mission. Services and meetings of all kinds will be arranged, and, as far as possible, an agency for house to house visitation organized. An attempt must be made to relieve in some wise and practical, though very limited way, the abounding misery, whilst care is taken to prevent the abuse of charity. In this matter the injudicious and inexperienced may easily do more harm than good, pauperising the people whom they wish to help, and making hypocrites instead of Christians. To indicate what we mean we may mention one case pointed out to us of a woman who attended three different places of worship on the Sunday and

some others during the week, because she obtained charitable help from all. But we cannot on this account refuse to try some means of mitigating the suffering with which we come into contact. Therefore this must be attempted along with whatever other means the Committee, in conference with those who have had long experience of this work, may think likely to answer the end they have before them. Their hope is that at least some, even of the lowest and worst, may be gathered in ; and their aim will be to make as many of these as they can missionaries to the others ; for manifestly those who have been accustomed to speak to and work amongst a somewhat better section of the community will not be so likely to labour successfully amongst these outcasts as will those who have themselves been of their number. The three districts already fixed upon are, as it will be understood, intended only to afford a field for the immediate commencement of this beneficent work. Other districts will be occupied as funds come in and the resources of the Committee are enlarged ; but even the comparatively limited operations already undertaken will necessitate so great an expenditure and require so much aid from those who are qualified for the work, that they cannot wisely attempt more at present. For not only will the cost and furnishing of Halls and of carrying on the work be very large, but a relief fund will be needed as indicated above. The Committee, therefore, can only hope to carry forward with any success the project to which they have already put their hands, by the really devoted help of the churches which they represent.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICTS.

The district known as Collier's Rents is one of the three to which attention will first be given, and the old chapel, long disused, is now in the builders' hands and will soon be ready for opening, not as a chapel, but as a bright, comfortable, and in every way suitable Hall. It would be impossible to find a building better situated for working among the very poor and degraded than this. It stands in a short street, leading out of Long Lane, Bermondsey, the locality in which were recently found the bodies of nine infants, which had been deposited in a large box at the foot of some stairs in an undertaker's shop. There are around the Hall some 650 families, or 3250 people, living in 123 houses. The houses are largely occupied by costermongers, birdcatchers, street singers, liberated convicts, thieves and prostitutes. There are many low lodging-houses in the neighbourhood of the worst type. Some of them are tenanted chiefly by thieves, and one was pointed out which is kept by a receiver of stolen goods. In some cases two of the houses are united by means of a passage which affords a ready method of escape in case of police interference.

Turning out of one of these streets you enter a narrow passage, about ten yards long and three feet wide. This leads into a court eighteen yards long and nine yards wide. Here are twelve houses of three rooms each, and containing altogether 36 families. The sanitary condition of the place is indescribable. A large dust-bin charged with

all manner of filth and putrid matter stands at one end of the court, and four water-closets at the other. In this confined area all the washing of these 36 families is done, and the smell of the place is intolerable. Entering a doorway you go up six or seven steps into a long passage, so dark that you have to grope your way by the clammy, dirt-encrusted wall, and then you find a wooden stair, some of the steps of which are broken through. Ascending as best you can, you gain admission to one of the rooms. You find that although the front and back of the house are of brick, the rooms are separated only by partitions of boards, some of which are an inch apart. There are no locks on the doors and it would seem that they can only be fastened on the outside by padlock. In this room to which we have come an old bed, on which are some evil-smelling rags, is, with the exception of a broken chair, the only article of furniture. Its sole occupant just now is a repulsive, half-drunken Irishwoman. She is looking at some old ragged garments in hope of being able to raise something upon them at the pawnshop, and being asked if she is doing this because she is poor, she gets into a rage and cries, "Call me poor? I have got half a loaf of bread in the house, and a little milk;" and then from a heap of rubbish in one corner, she pulls out a putrid turkey, utterly unfit for human food, which she tells us she is going to cook for dinner. This woman has just "done seven days" for an assault upon a police officer. We find that she has a husband, but he spends almost all his money at the public-house.

Rooms such as this are let furnished (!) at 3s. 6d. and 4s. a week, or 8d. a night, and we are told that the owner is getting from 50 to 60 per cent. upon his money.

And this is a specimen of the neighbourhood. Reeking courts, crowded public-houses, low lodging-houses and numerous brothels are to be found all around. Even the cellars are tenanted. Poverty, rags and dirt everywhere. The air is laden with disease-breeding gases. The missionaries who labour here, are constantly being attacked by some malady or other resulting from blood poisoning, and their tact and courage are subjected to the severest tests. In going about these alleys and courts no stranger is safe if alone. Not long ago a doctor on his rounds was waylaid by a number of women, who would not let him pass to see his patient until he had given them money ; and a bible-woman, visiting " Kent Street," was robbed of most of her clothing. Even the police seldom venture into some parts of the district except in company. Yet bad as it is there are elements of hopefulness which encourage us to believe that our work will not be in vain. Many of its denizens would gladly break away from the dismal, degrading life they are leading, if only a way were made for them to do so ; as it is they are hemmed in and chained down by their surroundings in hopeless and helpless misery.

Such is Collier's Rents. To describe the other two localities where our work is to be commenced, in Ratcliff and Shadwell, would, in the main, be but to repeat the same heart-sickening story. Heart-sickening but soul-stirring. We have opened

but a little way the door that leads into this plague-house of sin and misery and corruption, where men and women and little children starve and suffer and perish, body and soul. But even the glance we have got is a sight to make one weep. We shall not wonder if some, shuddering at the revolting spectacle, try to persuade themselves that such things cannot be in Christian England, and that what they have looked upon is some dark vision conjured by a morbid pity and a desponding faith. To such we can only say, Will you venture to come with us and see for yourselves the ghastly reality? Others, looking on, will believe, and pity, and despair. But another vision will be seen by many, and in this lies our hope—a vision of Him who had “compassion upon the multitude because they were as sheep having no shepherd,” looking, with Divine pity in His eyes, over this outcast London, and then turning to the consecrated host of His Church with the appeal, “Whom shall we send and who will go for us?”

October, 1883.





OH, Thou, who once on earth, beneath the weight
Of our mortality, didst live and move,
The incarnation of profoundest love ;
Who on the Cross that love didst consummate—
Whose deep and ample fulness could embrace
The poorest, meanest, of our fallen race :
How shall we e'er that boundless debt repay ?
By long loud prayers in gorgeous temples said ?
By rich oblations on Thine altars laid ?
Ah, no ! not thus Thou didst appoint the way.
When Thou wast bowed our human woe beneath,
Then, as a legacy, Thou didst bequeath
Earth's sorrowing children to our ministry—
And, as we do to them we do to Thee.

ANNE CHARLOTTE LYNCH.

